

BOOK REVIEW

Palms Won't Grow Here and Other Myths. David A. Francko. 2003. Timber Press, Portland, OR. 267 p. \$27.95 hardcover (ISBN: 0-88192-575-6).

With a very interesting cover—a palm plant in the north-east that is covered with snow—Dr. David Francko's book, *Palms Won't Grow Here and Other Myths*, introduces you to a quiet scientific adventure. Chair of the Department of Botany at Miami University in Ohio, David Francko's academic specialty is aquatic plants. The core topic of his book is the result of his work on the hardy Palm Project and many years of experimenting with warm-climate plants, as well as ten years of data gathered from a variety of sources, including talking with botanical and nursery owners and even his neighbors.

Francko, in Chapter 1, states his disagreement with the general distinction of "north-by-south" landscaping. He thinks the distinction seeks to bridge the botanically unnecessary but often hard-and-fast perceived differences between southern and northern plants. This book interestingly challenges myths about where plants should grow and replaces them with evidence on the idea of where they can and do grow. It is designed to expand your palette to give you a 64-crayon box of cold-hardy species in the landscape trade, rather than the conditioned belief that gardeners' palettes in cold-winter areas are limited to only a few colors.

Regardless of where you travel in the world, you will find that typical household, civic, and industrial gardens in a given region share certain characteristics. Francko believes that gardening is as much about personal outlook as it is about techniques. He challenges the notion that tradition alone is a valid reason for restricting yourself to default gardening in temperate parts of the United States, Canada, and Europe. He especially challenges the notion that southern plants cannot be grown in temperate gardens. Francko uses the term southern to denote those plants that are considered by most gardeners to be subtropical or tropical, as well as those traditional mainstays of the southern US garden, for example magnolias and crape myrtles. The term temperate is often incorrectly used to denote northern climates. In fact, much of the southern and lower Midwest of the United States feature a temperate climate. This book describes temperate plants as those that can grow in regions with true four-season climates and a cold winter. It describes as warm-temperature plants those that can grow in regions with true four-season climates and mild winters.

Chapter 2 defines major terms such as cold hardiness, a term that the author sees as having been lacking in gardening books. There are two types of hardiness: aboveground (wood) with a lower temperature of -5° F (-21° C) and underground (root) with a lower temperature of -24° F (-31° C). Francko suggests that there is a large and quite fluid hardiness range with regard to north-by-south landscaping plants and in doing so he challenges the idea that southern plants cannot be grown in northern areas. He provides excellent ideas for gardening and, to that end, he includes the USDA hardiness zone map. More importantly, he re-emphasizes the significance of microclimate in determining what can and should be grown in a particular area. The chapter concludes very nicely with 79 high-quality photo-

graphs of different plant types from southern and northern parts of the country.

In chapters 3 and 4 the author presents a discussion on microclimate-based landscape planning and design and how to care for warm-climate plants. For designing north-by-south landscaping the owner should work with his property and not against it. Location and the right cultural conditions as well as hardiness zone are crucial factors to be considered when integrating tropical plants into an existing temperate landscape. Other factors involve sources of heat, compass orientation (normally south and southeast facing walls are the warmest in a house), elevation, existing landscape features, and full-sun and shady areas. Gardeners should also recognize plants as architectural features that make a visual statement. The chapters provide an informed description of how to prepare beds for specimen and companion plants, along with photographs of different examples. With regard to the care of warm-weather plants, Francko provides good suggestions, including heeding the three-year established rule; mulching with a 2-to-3 inch layer of pine, cypress, or hardwood; fertilizing with slow release of macro-nutrients; and controlling weeds, insects, and plant diseases. These two chapters are very informative in the way they suggest best practices on designing, planning, and caring of aesthetically pleasing landscape.

The second part of the book presents four other chapters that focus on warm-climate plants for temperate landscapes. Chapter 5 extensively provides examples of the cold-hardy palm family. Although most palms grow in warm climates, it is a myth that palms are exclusively tropical species. Francko states that cold-hardy palms, like other cold-hardy broadleaved evergreens, have the genetic and physiological ability to survive extreme cold. Most palms, such as the coconut palm, date palm, and cabbage palm, are abroscent plants that feature a woody trunk. People usually refer to woody palms when they talk about palms. The clump palms tend to be more cold hardy, such as the needle palm which can tolerate -5° F (-21° C). Every section of this chapter is also well illustrated.

Other examples of warm-climate landscape plants are provided in the next three chapters. The author believes that the broadleaved evergreen trees and shrubs are the heart and soul of all warm-climate landscapes. The plant guide provides excellent suggestions on how to better cultivate warm-climate plants under temperate conditions, as well as the adaptability of those plants. The plants discussed include evergreen magnolias, camellias, heavenly bamboo, Mediterranean heath, jasmines, citrus varieties, southern oak, crape myrtles, bananas, and cacti. Although presented in a scientific manner, these chapters use layperson's terms and their own words. For example, a bamboo pioneer from Ohio states, with regard to growing bamboo in a temperate climate, "first they sleep, then they creep, then they leap."

In conclusion, this book is easy to read and very informative to graduate students and scientists, as well as gardeners. It provides a comprehensive guide, with wonderful illustrations, of a variety of warm-climate and exotic plants that can be grown in cold regions.

SUFIAN A. FORAWI

College of Education
University of Akron
Akron, OH 44325
Email: sufian@uakron.edu